

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)
Code 327



DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSES

The purpose of this practice is to support one or more of the following:

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

CONDITIONS WHERE THIS PRACTICE APPLIES

On land retired from agricultural production or other lands requiring permanent protective cover, including land entered into retirement programs. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes Stated Above

Vegetative species shall be adapted to soil, range site, and climate conditions.

Vegetative species will be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of non-native invasive species shall not be used.

Seeding rates and methods will be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose. (References include but not limited to Florida Technical Notes, Plant Materials Section; National Biology Manual; Range Management for Important Native Grasses of Florida; and Florida Native Seed Production Manual).

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock will ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival.

Only viable, high quality, and adapted seed or planting stock will be used.

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Trees and shrubs will be planted according to Florida NRCS conservation practice standard, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Vegetative manipulation to maximize plant and animal diversity shall be accomplished by prescribed burning or mechanical, biological or chemical methods, or a combination of the four. All burning will be in conformance with Florida NRCS conservation practice standard Prescribed Burning, Code 338.

Grasses, forbs, and legumes when planted together shall be planted in a manner and rates that will ensure survival of forbs and legumes.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose. Application of nutrients and pest control will be in conformance with Florida NRCS conservation practice standards Nutrient Management, Code 590, and Pest Management, Code 595.

Erosion rates shall be held to, or below, soil loss tolerance.

Impacts to cultural resources and Federal and State protected species shall be evaluated during planning, design and implementation of this conservation practice in accord with established National and Florida NRCS policy (General Manual, Title 420-Part 401 and Title 190-Part 410.22; National Planning Procedures Handbook, FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.5).

Additional Criteria To Enhance Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment. Category I & II invasive plant species as defined by the Florida Exotic Plant Council shall not be used.

Grasses, forbs, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity.

Selection and planting rates shall be made based on values to the wildlife under consideration. Further guidance is found in the NRCS National Biology Manual as supplemented and in the Florida NRCS conservation practice standard, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645.

Planned watering facilities will be in conformance with NRCS Florida conservation practice standard Wildlife Watering Facility, Code 648.

Management. Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

A reduction in general agricultural seeding rates shall be used for wildlife plantings to create a more open plant structure that allows increased forb production and wildlife movement.

Management practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the primary nesting period (i.e., March 1 to July 15); exceptions as provided under the Operation and Maintenance section of this standard apply. Strip maintenance practices of the area are acceptable based on the operation and maintenance plan.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of weedy species shall be performed on a "spot treatment" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

See Florida NRCS conservation practice standards, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645, and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 644, for further guidance on wildlife habitat.

Additional Criteria To Improve Water Quality

Appropriate conservation practices shall be installed where erosion is occurring; adjacent to water bodies, wetlands, sinks, and/or other sensitive areas; and/or other areas where water quality may be impaired. These Florida NRCS conservation practice standards include but are not limited to Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 392; Critical Area Planting, Code 342; Filter Strip, Code 393; and Field Border, Code 386.

The width of all buffers must be adequate to protect the area of concern from wind and water borne sediments.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

The use of native plant species (grasses, forbs and legumes) should be encouraged for all cover situations.

Consider rotating management activities (e.g. mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

In riparian areas, consider the use of native plants for conservation cover in the restoration of these ecosystems.

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

Where the site is erosive and has concentrated runoff, combinations of erosion control practices should be included to provide the most desirable effects.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. As a minimum the specifications shall include:

1. Location of practice
2. Recommended plant species
3. Seeding or vegetative rates
4. Dates for establishment by plant species
5. Establishment procedures, including planting depth and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended.

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period (March 1 – July 15) for grassland species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds and other non-native invasive species will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields in order to comply with state noxious weed laws.

REFERENCES

Florida NRCS conservation practice standards
 Critical Area Planting, Code 342
 Field Border, Code 386
 Filter Strip, Code 393
 Nutrient Management, Code 590
 Pest Management, Code 595
 Prescribed Burning, Code 338
 Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 392
 Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612
 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645
 Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 644
 Wildlife Watering Facility, Code 648
 General Manual, Part 401
 National Planning Procedures Handbook
 NRCS Florida Technical Notes
 NRCS, Florida Native Seed Production Manual
 NRCS National Biology Manual
 Range Management for Important Native Grasses of Florida